

THE PROMISE OF EMBRYONIC STEM CELLS
UNITED STATES SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

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TESTIMONY
OF
CHRIS DUDLEY

Good afternoon Senator Smith and members of the Committee. Thank you for the invitation to appear before your Committee today to tell you about how living with juvenile diabetes has impacted my life and the lives of so many children that I have met over the years through my Foundation and at my basketball camp.

My name is Chris Dudley and I played professional basketball for 16 years with Cleveland, New Jersey, Portland, and New York. I am the proud father of three beautiful children ages 6,5 and 3. I also have juvenile diabetes.

I was diagnosed at the age of 16. I had the classic symptoms of excessive thirst and having to go to the bathroom constantly. My uncle has diabetes, so my dad recognized the symptoms and bought a home test kit and it showed that my blood sugar level was very high. We immediately went to the hospital and I was diagnosed. When I first heard the news, I was devastated. I didn't really know enough about the disease and I tried to learn as much as I could. I was fortunate that the doctors and nurses said that I would be able to continue to play basketball if I was careful about monitoring my blood sugar, and this made me feel better. This is not always the case – many times kids with juvenile diabetes are not encouraged to keep playing sports because of fears of what can happen. I was also fortunate that my family was so supportive and encouraged me to continue to play basketball and not let my diabetes stop me from doing what I loved. After my diagnosis I really looked up to people like Bobby Clarke who had diabetes and was playing for the Philadelphia Flyers and I had heard of a triathlete who had diabetes. I thought, if these people can compete at such a high level then I can play Junior varsity basketball.

Ever since that time, I have been an outspoken advocate for encouraging kids with diabetes to pursue their passions – whether it be sports or other activities – provided they take care of their diabetes. That being said, diabetes is such a hard disease because you have to stay on top of it every hour of every day or you can face serious complications. Diabetes never stopped me from playing basketball, but there were many times where the disease did hinder my performance.

When I was playing in the NBA, I would have to test my blood sugar 14 times on game day and take multiple insulin shots. When you are preparing to play in front of 20,000 people you want your sugar to be as close to normal as possible. This is very difficult to

do, and some days, no matter how hard you try, it's never perfect. It took a lot of practice and monitoring, but I was able to learn how to play the best I could. I was fortunate in that my teammates were always supportive. It was amazing to me how many people have some kind of connection with diabetes, so there was a great understanding of what I had to go through every day just to be able to play basketball.

I also had my battles with diabetes. In college I was in a car accident. After working out, my blood sugar suddenly dropped too low and I ran into a parked car. There are so many variables in trying to manage your diabetes and it is a daily battle. I have had diabetes for 24 years, and I worry every day about the long-term risks and what the disease is doing to my body.

Now that I am retired from the NBA, my passion is my family – my 3 kids – advocating on behalf of research to get us to a cure for juvenile diabetes as soon as possible, and enabling kids with diabetes to pursue their dreams. I started the Dudley Foundation in 1994, and the Chris Dudley Basketball Camp for Kids with Diabetes in Veronia, Oregon. At the camp, I see first hand what these kids – some of them very young – have to go through every day. Some struggle much more than others, not because they are being lazy about monitoring their blood sugars, but because it is just more difficult for some kids to keep their sugar levels in range, as hard as they try. When I talk to kids with diabetes and work with them at the camp, I walk a fine line. I want to show them that diabetes doesn't have to stop you from doing whatever you want to do. But on the other hand, I know that it's not easy for them and that they will never get a day off from this disease. And it's not easy for their parents, either. Parents of the kids who come to my camp tell me that it's the only week throughout the whole year that they can sleep through the night without having to constantly get up to check on their kids.

I worry every day that one of my kids will be diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. And even though I have been very blessed in my life and have been able to achieve great things even with diabetes, this is not the life I want for my children. I am missing my 6 year old son's graduation to be here today, but I explained to him that being in Washington was my opportunity to help people understand why a cure for diabetes is so important.

Last August, I received an award from President Bush for my camp and I traveled with the President in Portland that day. I told him about what it's like to live with juvenile diabetes and the struggles the kids who come to my camp face every day. I also told him that as a pro-life Republican I supported embryonic stem cell research and believed that the federal policy should be expanded to allow our brightest scientists to pursue embryonic stem cell research with vigor. Research is the only avenue to cures and therapies for diabetes and many other diseases, and we should pursue this promising research aggressively within an appropriate ethical framework.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for this opportunity – it has been an honor to appear before you today.